THE TOWN IN THE VILLAGE AND THE VILLAGE IN THE TOWN
An examination of a discursive dichotomy in Melanesia

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ABSTRACT. Melanesians had no experience of towns until Europeans developed them, and for several decades 'town' remained a distant place far-flung 'villagers' could only try to imagine. Conversely, early colonial officials applied the term 'village' indiscriminately to local habitats that often bore no resemblance to one. In this article I interrogate the development and resilience of the discursive town-village dichotomy from the colonial period to the present day, and the popular imagery especially of 'villages' with its implications of cultural integrity grounded in egalitarianism, communalism, and tradition. This imagery is found not only in development-aid literature and foreign media representations of villages, but also in the discourse of contemporary Melanesians. I contrast this representation with a variety of research findings that disclose the relationship between towns and so-called village society, and its changing nature over a number of decades.

A recent trend in development-aid literature has been the adaptation of the concept of 'village cities' to discussions of urbanisation in the Pacific Islands.[1] The term refers to the degree to which Pacific nations' capital cities in particular are characterised by informal housing, or 'settlements' which 'display village-like features in their organization, management and way of life' (ADB 2016:xi). This characterisation of urban 'villages' is not new, of course. In the late colonial period, for example, researchers noted that in Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea (PNG), migrants attempted to replicate their home villages in ethnically insular settlements.[2] Likewise, the characterisation of rural villages is not new: the discussion of village cities turns on the argument that '[k]in-based communal, sharing and egalitarian values and practices lie at the heart of the social organisation and structure of village-like settlements and native and traditional villages' (ADB 2016:xiv). However, anthropological research suggests that these are nowadays hasty generalisations. For example at a conference with the theme '"Village" and "town" in Oceania' that I recently attended, presenters offered an ethnographic variety of contemporary habitats that could not be classified either structurally or socially as 'towns' or (traditional) 'villages' without a raft of qualifications.[3]

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[1]   See, for example, Asian Development Bank [ADB] (2016).
[2]   Hitchcock and Oram (1967:43), Forbes and Jackson (1975)
[3]   The conference was held at the Frobenius Institute, Goethe University Frankfurt, 1–3 April 2016. A pdf of the conference abstracts is available online at www2.pazifik-infostelle.org/uploads/programm_fv.pdf. This article is based on my keynote address.

In this article, considering only Melanesia, I interrogate the development and resilience of the discursive town-village dichotomy from the colonial period to the present day, and the popular imagery especially of 'villages', where people's lifestyles are said to be 'based on attachment to kin, tradition, and custom' (ADB 2016:x). The implication of cultural integrity grounded in egalitarianism, communalism, and tradition is found not only in development-aid literature and foreign media representations of villages, but also in the discourse of contemporary Melanesians. The degree to which these sentiments govern life in so-called villages nowadays is moot, so we need to question their influence on contemporary town living. In discussing town life here I refer to a large extent to Port Moresby, where I have conducted research in a variety of environments, and comparatively to Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, and the Solomon Islands capital, Honiara, which are now commonly regarded as 'cities'. The village is a more elusive object by contrast, as 'village' has always been a term of convenience, glossing a wide variety of habitats. Discursively the village continues to be largely represented by Melanesians themselves as an autonomous, culturally authentic, habitat. I contrast this representation with a variety of research findings that disclose the relationship between towns and so-called village society, and its changing nature over a number of decades.

Early colonialism: creating the town and the village

The discursive dualism of village and town in Melanesia is historically grounded in the assumptions and attitudes of colonial Europeans. Melanesians had no experience of towns until Europeans developed them. Moreover, they had no language equivalents for the word 'town', which was invariably adopted by them in a pidgin form and in most cases before they had ever seen a physical example. Conversely, early colonial officials applied the convenient terms 'village' and 'villagers' indiscriminately to local habitats and their inhabitants, often inappropriately where the 'village' was a hamlet of only four or five houses, or where a local population in fact lived in homesteads dispersed across grasslands. Where substantial indigenous settlements did exist near small colonial enclaves, the tendency to refer to the enclaves as 'towns' often contradicted conventional European understandings of the relative sizes of villages and towns. For example, in the 1880s British colonial officers purchased blocks of land from the Motu and Koita – the traditional inhabitants of the local area – to establish the administrative headquarters that would become the capital of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby. In 1888, it had a resident population of seven people. By 1900 it still had less than hundred residents. It had a handful of wooden offices, a government store and a rudimentary gaol. It was still smaller than most British villages, but it was already being called a 'township' by its European occupants (Oram 1976:27–28), while a dense cluster of Motu-Koita houses nearby with a population of more than 1,200 people was deemed a 'village'. The Motu language term for landscapes socialised by human habitation was 'hanua', a term derived

from the proto-Oceanic '*panua'. Like cognates such as 'vanua' and 'fanua' in other Austronesian languages it had dense cosmo-ontological connotations and its translation into English required caution.[4] However, the term 'hanua' was simply translated as 'village' in the early colonial era, and the enduring popular name for the large settlement cluster that actually dwarfed the 'township' of Port Moresby at the turn of the twentieth century was Hanuabada, translated as 'big village'. As Tok Pisin (the pidgin lingua franca) spread through Melanesia, its elastic term 'ples' was increasingly used by Melanesians to refer to their home place, variously meaning a region, an ethno-linguistic group territory, or a smaller proprietary landscape section. Nevertheless 'village' and 'villager' have prevailed as English-language descriptive terms to the present day.

Villages were not only a conceptual imposition. In many areas they were structurally generated by colonial administrative strategies and missionary church-building, as indigenes merged scattered hamlets into single settlements in response to official directives, or moved their habitats close to churches.[5] Colonial and missionary administration in the early twentieth century also re-ordered *ples* life through rules imposing European ideas of hygiene and productive activities. Latrines, burial procedures, building and maintaining access roads, churches, patrol posts and rest houses were among the innovations that modified indigenous habitats into villages acceptable to European sensibilities.[6] It was several decades, on the other hand, before the colonial administrative settlements would develop to a size or density that justified calling them towns. In Port Moresby a small hospital, two hotels and three or four stores operated by Australian-based trading companies were among the additions supporting a slowly increasing population of Europeans, but it was not until the 1940s that Port Moresby's expatriate residents had 'standards of services and amenities similar to those available in a small Australian town of the same period' (Oram 1976:41).

Port Moresby's establishment and early growth was achieved without displacing local settlements, and the occupants were willing to sell portions of their traditional land to the colonizers. Similarly, in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) a French company seeking to establish French political control in the late nineteenth century bought up land from indigenes around a natural harbour called Vila on Efate Island. While the purchasing process was less scrupulous than the transactions in Port Moresby (see van Trease 1987:26–27, 181–182) the subsequent establishment of the town of Port Vila did not displace the existing settlements. The town became the administrative centre of a French-British colonial condominium, which gained independence and adopted the name Vanuatu in 1980. In contrast, when the colonial administration headquarters in Fiji was shifted from Levuka to a permanent location known as Suva in 1882, the indigenous people, the Suvavou, were shifted off their peninsula to land outside the

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4   Pawley (2005). Cf. Ravuvu (1988:7), Rodman (1987:35).
5   Baxter (1973:35), Firth (1986:95), Miyazaki (2004:31–35)
6   Barker (1996), Baxter (1973), Wolfers (1975:22, 94–95)

designated town area (Miyazaki 2004). The significant feature shared by most of these enclaves was that while immediate landholders were largely allowed to move through them indigenes were excluded from residence unless they were in gaol, or recognised as immediate landholders with the right to be there, or had servile positions allowing them to be in town, but confined to dormitories or similar quarters after working hours (Mecartney 2000:50; Wolfers 1975:50–52, 75). These two early-colonial domains, the European-controlled indigenous habitat and the more-or-less exclusive European enclave, provided the ground for a discursive dichotomy of 'village' and 'town' which went through a number of transformations through the twentieth century and continues to be modified today.

POST-WAR COLONIALISM: THE VILLAGER COMES TO TOWN

The village-town dichotomy was articulated with an assumption that villagers were unready for incorporation into the 'civilized' environments of towns. This was evidenced by discriminatory regulations especially in PNG under Australian rule, in which 'the native' was more or less explicitly depicted as primitive and ignorant (Firth 1997:262–263; Wolfers 1975:45–61, 74–87) and a danger especially to white women (Inglis 1974). There was significant lessening of the exclusivity of towns after the Second World War. Rebuilding, policy changes and economic developments combined to relax the previous restrictions preventing migration from rural areas, and Melanesians began to move into towns. The demographic changes did not bring a complete change in colonial attitudes, however. The more recently contacted peoples of the mountainous interior of New Guinea were particularly denigrated as primitive, compared to the long-missionized and relatively western-educated coastal peoples (Hughes 1965:346, Levine and Levine 1979:14). As late as the 1960s, paternalistic colonial officials displayed a resistance to recognizing the adaptability of all but a few educated Melanesians to 'civilized' town life. The development of psychiatric services in PNG during the period was partly informed by beliefs that 'village' life was relatively stress-frees, and that 'civilisation' and urbanisation would place psychological stress on indigenes.[7] The proper place of natives was thought to be the village, co-operating with the Administration's patrol officers: 'Officials were comfortable with "native leaders" but suspicious of "educated natives"' (Denoon 2005:44).

Migrants to the rebuilt towns, and to new post-war towns like Honiara in Solomon Islands found themselves residentially segregated from Europeans (Oram 1976:84–103, Frazer 1981:201–205). The migrant inflow increased faster than town authorities were prepared for, and was mostly accommodated in informal housing. Large numbers of newcomers gained permission from either town authorities or from local traditional

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[7]   Sinclair (1957), Burton-Bradley (1975). Cf. Goddard (2011:43–48).

landholders to build dwellings on unused land. Others lived in the dormitories provided by the trading companies that employed them in labouring work. The post-war towns were already being referred to as 'urban', though they were hardly large enough to justify the term. Nevertheless, their residential areas were steadily growing, and migrants were visibly swelling their populations. Urban research in Oceania began to emerge in the 1960s, accompanied by research into the motivations and movements of migrants.[8] These studies challenged the Administration's prevailing attitude that Melanesians should remain in their 'villages' and that towns, as colonial administrative centres, were not suitable environments for them.[9] As John McCreary (1973) observed, urban life was a contemporary social fact contextualised in social change and an increasing cash economy affecting the whole of society in the Pacific islands. Under the circumstances a large number of 'push' and 'pull' factors contributed to rural-urban drift, including unemployment and under-employment in rural areas, a desire to escape the traditional constrictions of rural habitats where cash and education were hard to acquire, and the attractiveness of towns where these growing necessities were potentially available (McCreary 1973:14–15).

As the numbers of migrants increased, and the research on them broadened among town planners, human geographers, economists and anthropologists during the 1970s,[10] more contrasts than commonalities became apparent among the motivations, expectations and goals of migrants. It was observed that strategies of some migrants were oriented towards a return to *ples*, while others seemed to be leaving *ples* altogether. There were circular migrants, and when home areas were not too remote from towns there were bi-local residents. Anthropological investigations, concentrating mostly on Port Moresby, exposed cultural factors linking migrants to their rural origins beyond economic considerations[11] and demonstrated that there was no simple model that could cover the varieties of migrant motives, strategies, behaviour or fate.

I resided in Port Moresby in the early 1970s, and can give some personal observations on the period, when I was friendly with a group of migrants from Chimbu, an area in the PNG highlands. In the late colonial period when they started to migrate into Port Moresby, the Chimbu in particular were stereotyped by the majority of Australian residents as primitive and ignorant. Lacking the schooling that people living near Port Moresby had received for decades, many (but not all) of the highlanders were non-literate, and untrained in trades or professions. In town both men and women worked as domestic servants or gardeners, or in other manual work for private employers or the public service. These types of jobs were not stable, and people switched from one to an-

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8   See, for example, South Pacific Commission (1966).
9   De Bruijn (1963), McCreary (1973), Oram (1964)
10   The range of PNG studies to the mid 1970s is handily, though not exhaustively, summarised in Harris (1974).
11   See, for example, Hitchcock and Oram (1967), Oram (1967), Salisbury and Salisbury (1972), Strathern (1975), Whiteman (1973), Zimmerman (1973).

other fairly frequently and experienced periods of unemployment. Among my friends, most were domestic servants and one woman was self-employed in prostitution. None of them spoke English. New arrivals from their *ples* were taught domestic service skills by their already-established kinsmen, who lived mostly in sheds in the back gardens of their European employers. They subscribed to a rotating credit system among themselves, called *kampani* in Tok Pisin, whereby they pooled a proportion of each member's fortnightly earnings, which was given in a lump sum to one of them to spend as they wished (cf. Skeldon 1980). Importantly, though, the fortnightly *kampani* meetings that I saw were as concerned with discussing and negotiating the problems of working for Europeans whose expectations and reactions were unpredictable as they were with distributing credit.

Some of my Chimbu friends were adept thieves, and once when I opened a wardrobe in my house that I hadn't used for quite a while, I found a large collection of items including radios, playing cards, reading lamps, clothing, and so on. I was told these were being stored for an eventual return to *ples* with plans to open a small trade store – though I was fairly sure they were actually being sold on the local black market. Most of the goods had been stolen from employers' houses, and my friends explained their techniques to me with some pride. They were so skilled that their employers never suspected them, and rarely even noticed the items had gone. My friends had adapted well to town life for their own purposes, and were modifying colonially introduced institutions (capitalism, labour, markets, credit systems) to their own ends, but in conversation it was clear that their goals were *ples* oriented, they were in town to become better 'villagers', and they maintained their *ples* sociality as much as they could (cf Whiteman 1973).

The 1970s: the village in the town

Not all of my friends were stabilised in a particular residence. A number moved back and forth among various European backyard sheds, called *boi haus* in Australian adaptations of Tok Pisin,[12] and a village-styled Chimbu settlement on a hill in an outer suburb. The settlement, like other informal settlements growing in and around Port Moresby and other Melanesian towns like Honiara in Solomon Islands and Port Vila in the New Hebrides, was a response to the lack of available formal housing.[13] It also manifested an attempt by migrants to recreate the social relationships and spatial organisation which they knew in *ples*. These were examples of the 'village' in the town, inasmuch as they were built like the modified habitats developed after the migrants' home areas had come under colonial control. In Port Moresby, under the constrictions

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12   Australians at the time also called male domestic servants 'haus boi'. In contrast, indigenous Tok Pisin speakers called the building 'haus boi' and their employment 'boi haus'.

13   Bedford (1973:105–109), Oram (1976:95–103), Frazer (1981:201–205)

of available space in town, houses were usually built in rows facing a street through the middle of the settlement, on plots whose boundaries were marked by decorative plants. An early example was a settlement known as Ranuguri, established just after the war and inhabited by migrants from several villages in the eastern part of the Papuan Gulf region. The clusters of houses were organised spatially in a pattern reproducing in miniature the geographical relationship of their inhabitants' villages of origin (Forbes and Jackson 1975). The pattern prevailed for decades, and was still in place when I did research in Ranuguri in the 1990s (Goddard 2005:51–76).

While the motives of migrants were sometimes reported to include a desire to escape negative aspects of the sociality of their *ples* such as interpersonal frictions, sorcery, conflicts with neighbouring groups and (with a new awareness of alternatives) the perceived constrictions of traditionalism,[14] the steady increase of migrants in ethnolinguistically exclusive settlements inevitably brought those same issues to town.[15] The most prevalent motivation of migrants was economic, as the spreading cash economy was changing the nature of subsistence in rural society.[16] In a study of economic aspects of Orokaiva migrants, Michael Baxter (1973) noted the transfer of money from town to support kin in *ples*, and the transfer of food from *ples* to town to support migrant kin. The town was 'a vital integral part of the village world' (1973:111). Baxter added:

> The main reason that the village and urban areas have existed in a complementary fashion is that conditions have been so similar in each that movement between the two has been able to take place with few negative consequences for either the village or the individual (1973:115).

Many migrants were by this time making town their home, and by the end of the 1970s there were town-born children who had not seen their parents' *ples* (Morauta 1979). Moreover, whether they were living in low-cost or informal housing, or appeared to be unemployed or relatively poor, Melanesians were no longer socially marginal. The towns were emerging from the colonial era, and the European populations were now a shrinking minority.

Despite some migrants becoming permanent town dwellers, there was not yet a clear distinction between a Melanesian 'townsperson' and a 'villager'. Even those committing to long-term residency could not divest themselves of the sociality of their *ples*, and many people who appeared to live in towns were actually bi-local (Ryan 1970, cf. Morauta 1979). Additionally, ethical misgivings about town life were being observed among some migrants, who Hal and Marlene Levine described as 'ambivalent townsmen' (1979). They appeared to enjoy the excitements of town, but denigrated the expense and violence of life in a place of strangers. Migrating to town for money, nightlife

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[14]   Conroy and Skeldon (1977), Levine and Levine (1979)
[15]   See, for example, Strathern (1975), Whiteman (1973).
[16]   Baxter (1973), Conroy and Skeldon (1977), Salisbury and Salisbury (1972)

and new experiences and knowledge were perceived as 'wrong or even decadent reasons for leaving one's home […]. The fact that one was addicted to town life was nothing to be proud of' (Levine and Levine 1979:1).

The movement back and forth between town and *ples* was easier for some migrants than others – particularly when the distance travelled required the expense of a plane trip –, but the economic support phenomenon colloquially called the *wantok* system enabled even unemployed people in town to occasionally visit their homeplace if there was a ritual or social obligation to do so. The Tok Pisin term 'wantok' ('one talk') was possibly derived from plantation conditions where workers would provide mutual support to others from the same language group in the manner of extended kindred, but in towns 'wantok' was an elastic term for quasi-kinship relationships and a sense of compatriotism which could be invoked according to a person's socio-economic needs (Monsell-Davis 1993, Rew 1974:28). '*Wantok*ism' was fed by the compelling sense of obligation and reciprocation which underlay Melanesian sociocentrism: the perceived need of a kinsperson for economic help or accommodation in town was almost impossible to refuse.

The 1980s: the burden of town dwellers and the romanticised village

*Wantok*ism provided a supportive network within town, where long-term town dwellers were immersed in the cash economy and the expense of maintaining adequate housing and living conditions. The expectations of their primary *wantok*s – their *ples*-based ('village') kin – were not informed by a nuanced understanding of town economics, and their parochialism could be burdensome. I saw this from a *ples* perspective when I returned to PNG in the mid 1980s as a fieldworking anthropologist (see Goddard 2011) in the upper Kaugel Valley in the Western Highlands, where the Kakoli people lived – not in villages, but in dispersed homesteads. The majority of Kakoli were more or less permanent valley residents, but there was nevertheless a small but steady flow of migrants leaving and returning with various intentions and fortunes. The nearest town was Mt Hagen, which had begun as a colonial patrol post in the 1950s. It was accessible in the 1980s by truck on a mostly unsealed road in three hours or so. It was where the Kakoli sold produce and bought wholesale items, like cartons of tinned fish and sacks of rice, and cartons of beer in large amounts for pay-weekend binge drinking back in the valley.

Kakoli who worked in Mt Hagen and stayed in settlements there were, of course, expected to be in regular contact and contribute to clan activities and rituals because they were only a three-hour vehicle ride away. A lesser number of people had been further afield, to big towns like Lae on the north coast or Port Moresby on the south coast. For these, the obligation to share resources was also inescapable, especially if they were well-established town residents. As well as sending resources back to the valley, they were expected to host any kinsfolk who came to town. Those who had become

successful in business, or national or local administration positions, were expected to be especially generous. Of those who left in search of formal education, wealth or prestige, some returned successful and shared their fortune visibly through favours such as generous contributions to bridewealth, loans of cash, provision of motor vehicles, beer parties and so on. Some used their acquired skills more formally for the benefit of the community, helping provide road upgrades, the development of schools, or – if they had business connections – nepotistic strategies providing employment opportunities for fellow Kakoli. Others returned with nothing but tales of adventure or frustration in a distant town, and worked hard to reintegrate themselves into local social relations. Materially successful migrants (or those who claimed to be) who were perceived not to share or use their gains for the community's advantage were subject to transparent jealousy, hostility and ostracism (Goddard 2011:140–144).

The Kakoli case was not untypical. For Melanesians who were successful in their careers in town the expectations of kin at their *ples* could be daunting. Deborah van Heekeren gives an example of a man who finally returned to his *ples*, a PNG south-coast village, aged in his eighties after being away for nearly fifty years (2010:54–55). He recalled that when he left, in the 1950s, villager parents expected their children to be very wealthy when they came back to the village and to send them large amounts of money while they were away. However, having trained as a teacher, he had married and settled in a distant part of the country where he also came to have many obligations. He felt that he had disappointed his own family and it was not until old age that he returned, at the turn of the twenty-first century, to his home village. Exemplifying villagers' inadequate understanding of the socioeconomic complexities of permanent town residence, Louise Morauta's interlocutors in Kukipi village in the Gulf Province of PNG complained that when they visited kin in Port Moresby their hosts were not generous with food or money and town-dwelling relatives other than their hosts did not visit them and give them spending money (Morauta 1984:101). The urban hosts, on the other hand, complained about the costs of feeding rural visitors and sending them home (1984:100).

Ethnography in the 1970s had shown that it was unwise to generalise about the attitudes and expectations migrants developed about town or their *ples*.[17] In the 1980s increasing numbers of migrants were becoming permanent townspeople. For example, where Dawn Ryan had previously described Uritai people (Eastern Gulf Province) in Port Moresby as 'bi-local' (1970), she observed a gradual decrease in primary links between the village and town as time went by. Fieldwork in the early 1980s confirmed for her that '[t]he village needs the town for its continued existence, but the town no longer needs the village, even though this is not generally recognized by the people themselves' (Ryan 1993:232). But while *ples* may have been less economically necessary for some townspeople, the imagined village was increasingly resonating with the rhetorics of

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[17] Compare, for example, Baxter (1973), Clunies Ross (1984), Conroy and Skeldon (1977), Ryan (1970), Salisbury and Salisbury (1972), and Strathern (1975:397–420).

post-colonialism through most of now-independent Melanesia. The new nations assert-
ed themselves by criticising institutions introduced by colonialism and advocated 'the
Melanesian way' (Narokobi 1980) and the reinforcement of 'custom' and 'traditional
culture' (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982). These idioms were dissected by academics who
were concerned with issues that Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (1992) collectively
termed the 'invention of tradition',[18] but their potency in the discourse of Melanesian
intellectuals and politicians was undeniable.[19]

The towns left by Europeans had not immediately become ethnic melting pots.
Diversity was reinforced by the regionalism of townspeople, regardless of how perma-
nent they were. Even town-born generations identified themselves with a *ples* that they
may never have visited, and were likely to marry other town dwellers with the same
ples identification.[20] Nevertheless, the major towns were viewed by Melanesians as the
places where their cultures and traditions were most vulnerable to loss under foreign
influences. A PNG government minister called them 'vacuums within which no posi-
tive replacement of value systems has been made' (Tammur 1979:46). The 'village' on
the other hand, was now romanticised as a place of tradition and the potential for cul-
tural preservation: 'Take a look at the old village structure and ask yourself why total
harmony always existed there' (Tammur 1979:46). Even the constraints of village life
could be integral to the cultural authenticity of the village represented by Melanesian
intellectuals:

> When you do return to your rural villages, one behaves just like the village folks; eats the
> same food, sleeps in the same house, talks the same language, sings the same songs, tells
> the same mythical legends and oral histories, wears the same costumes as they do, and
> engages in all work activities as they do, no matter how laborious or tiresome and boring
> they may be (Simet and Iamo 1992:14).

The dichotomisation of village and town lifestyles included comparisons of temporal
attitudes and the relative importance of money. An analytic chemist in Port Moresby,
for instance, typified his village as a place where 'one works only when one feels like it'
(in contrast to regimented work régimes in town), money was 'a complementary item
[…] not necessary', and 'life flows on with little or no consciousness of time' (Schwarz
1984:248). He expressed mixed feelings about the value to himself and the usefulness to
his village kin of his high status and financially rewarding town job, and his dreams of
returning to the village. 'I want to be united with my family and share their simple vil-
lage life, enjoying the beauty of nature and culture' (1984:249). These nostalgic, roman-
tic images of the 'village' were, of course, ahistorical and elided the influence of mis-
sionisation, colonial interventions and the intensification of the cash economy as well as

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18   See, for example, Lindstrom and White (1993), Linnekin and Poyer (1990), and Jolly (1992).
19   See, for example, Beier (1980), and Powell (1987).
20   See, for example, Ryan (1993:230–231).

the more recent direct and indirect effects of development aid and foreign investments in rural Melanesia. Villages were represented in popular discourse as autonomous communities manifesting localised traditional culture, even though the practice both of their inhabitants and of relatives in town were evidence of their integration into regional political and economic systems undergoing constant change.

THE 1990S: THE VILLAGER IN THE INIQUITOUS TOWN

In the 1990s, as in preceding post-war decades, population growth in Port Moresby was still outstripping the provision of affordable formal housing. Informal housing areas continued to grow, blurring into adjacent formal estates, and new 'settlements' continued to appear wherever there was available unused space. Contrary to popular stereotypes of informal housing areas (often labelled 'squatter' settlements) as criminogenic sites of poverty, tradespeople, public servants, university students, and even politicians could be found living in settlements. Conversely, formally unemployed people could be found living, even squatting, in formal housing estates – including that of the University of PNG, where I lived and worked at the time. While the settlements were stereotyped as migrant habitats, by this time a great many of their inhabitants had been born and brought up in town. Ironically, many of the prominent public servants and politicians who habitually blamed 'migrants' in 'squatter settlements' for crime and social disorder and demanded that they be sent 'back to the village' were in fact recent and likely temporary migrants themselves.[21]

Little research was done among town-dwelling professionals at the time,[22] and crime, poverty, and unemployment were major preoccupations among researchers. However, these categories were themselves problematic. The degree of unemployment was difficult to measure. Town-dwellers combined formal and informal employment, or even opted out of formal employment because they could earn more in informal employment, which was dynamic, periodic and creative. People could be economically inactive at one moment, and lucratively self-employed at another, in a variety of legitimate and illegitimate ways (Barber 1993). Informal income-earning ventures included street-side selling of a myriad of items such as home-produced foodstuffs, artefacts, items of clothing, ornaments, cigarettes and betelnut, as well as casual cash-on-completion building and carpentry work, theft and prostitution (Barber 1993, Umezaki 2010).

The supply networks used by informal vendors in Port Moresby stretched to many parts of the country, enabled by circular migration, bi-locality, and visiting kin who transported material produced in *ples* for sale on the street or in informal market places.

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[21]   For more detailed discussion on the subject of Port Moresby settlements during the 1990s, see Goddard (2005, 2009:124–142).

[22]   See, however, Rosi and Zimmer-Tamakoshi (1993).

Not only was there a movement of people between *ples* and town, but also among households in town, including between settlements and formal housing. An effect of this constant movement of people was that many households in town did not have a stable set of residents over time. For instance, in one settlement household of my acquaintance, the frequently-changing number of residents varied between four and twelve people over a four-year period that I monitored, during which the only permanent inhabitants were the married couple who had established the dwelling. Similar movement among households was also a feature in 'villages'. I found it among the Kakoli when I conducted my fieldwork there, and have observed it in other village societies that I have conducted research in subsequently.[23] In this respect 'village' behaviour, grounded in sociocentrism and the strong sense of obligation underlying kin-ordered sociality, endured even among long-term and permanent townspeople.

    Under the circumstances, poverty was difficult to measure – unkempt clothing, formal unemployment, and makeshift housing were unreliable guides. Ramshackle settlements were hardly the poverty-ridden, criminogenic environments that outsiders imagined them to be (Goddard 2005:17–50), and the street crime gangs known as *raskols* were not driven by generalised poverty or alienation. My own research analysis contextualised *raskols* – in that period – in a crime-fed gift economy involving social relations typical of pre-capitalist Melanesian societies (2005:77–120). Unable to access traditional resources in town to gain status and prestige through gifting, young men used the proceeds of crime instead, distributing them among *wantok*s.

    These examples indicate the degree to which the worldview and behaviour of *ples* was being reproduced in town, yet the popular dichotomies in the way Melanesians talked about the town and the village persisted. There was a pervading discursive association of rural life with authenticity, tradition and 'culture'. Sentiments associating towns with political and economic corruption, unhealthy foreign influence and the risk of cultural loss were expressed even by people of my acquaintance in Port Moresby who enjoyed town life and had secure employment in business or academia. Moreover, by the 1990s what had been an i m p l i c i t moral judgement in my acquaintances' discursive comparisons of villages and towns was becoming more e x p l i c i t. Village life was associated not only with tradition and culture*,* but also with moral integrity. Towns, on the other hand, were thought to be profane and to encourage moral decadence. This discursive contrast reflected the heightened influence of Christianity since Independence (when PNG was constitutionally declared a Christian nation). It has been conventionally estimated that more than ninety percent of the post-colonial country's population is nominally Christian (Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger 2005:6–7), and dualistic themes of Satan and God, sin and salvation, and so on, are rhetorically commonplace whether local groups have declaredly rejected their 'traditional' past or simply blended Christianity with pre-existing ontologies (Otto and Borsboom 1997, Robbins 2004).

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[23]   The Kalam in Madang Province, the Motu and Vula'a in Central Province.

Port Moresby, with its by-now constantly publicised political corruption, its ever-available alcohol, crime, formal and informal gambling venues, and rife prostitution, was a ready symbol of decadence. In fact, one of my students at the University of PNG at the time addressed the dangers of 'deconversion' in Port Moresby directly in an honours thesis (Freeman 1994). Contemporaneously my own regular research sites included a 'traditional' village, Pari, which had become peri-urban with the accelerated spread of Port Moresby in the past half century. Pari was missionised in the late nineteenth century, and Christianity became a major element in the identity of the village in the twentieth century when it was still a few kilometres outside the town. Fused with ideas of tradition, Christianity was vital in the village's sense of moral integrity as times changed, the nearby town grew into a city and spread, and the village became increasingly tied to a cash economy. Many Pari people worked in town, and so by the late twentieth century Port Moresby was discursively placed as a moral threat to the village. Crime, drunkenness, temptation and greed were among city characteristics which town-working or adolescent villagers were said to be prey to, bringing their influences back to Pari and disrupting the virtuous identity village elders were keen to preserve. The villagers chastised themselves constantly in village meetings. Unfortunately, the spreading city's edge was creeping ever closer, and by the end of the 1990s the village leaders and church elders were fighting a losing battle, especially against the village's young people who saw little ongoing value in so-called tradition (Goddard 2005:179–205).

The new century

Nowadays large numbers of people travel daily by road, water and air between rural places and towns, and many travel further, overseas, to live and work in all the world's continents. One of my Melanesian friends, for example, is a well-paid and highly qualified professional living near Sydney, Australia, with his wife and children in a well-to-do suburb. He also maintains a large home in his PNG village where his extended family live and where he visits whenever he can. He contributes capital for village ventures, such as commercial fishing equipment, boats and engines, and he is in constant touch with village relatives via smartphone and the internet. His connectedness with the village illustrates a widespread development in Melanesia: there are places the state has neglected, who have no infrastructure to speak of and no institutional state services, yet mobile phones, smartphones, internet access, solar power and the like are commonplace. Villagers communicate with other villages, with kin in town, with total strangers, and with contacts overseas, and even if they don't travel far, they are becoming ever more globally informed by these same means of communication.

Further, across Melanesia the elusive concept 'development' has been absorbed into lingua franca discourse, along with an increasing familiarity with development-aid keywors such as 'capacity-building' and 'awareness' (i.e. village information sessions de-

livered by visiting development-aid personnel).[24] In rural communities, knowledge and understanding of what 'development' might amount to materially is extremely variant. There are communities who consider themselves excluded from its benefits and who respond idiosyncratically to mythologised accounts of what other places might be receiving. There are communities who have experienced a little: a project that lasted as long as some aid-donor's interest, or until a change of policy at state level. But there are others who have felt a great impact: a neighbouring mine or other industrial exercise, with associated development-aid projects like roads, medical centres, schools and utilities, and also with inevitable social problems including the consequences of environmental damage and pollution, alcohol-related violence, crime, sexually transmitted diseases and an influx of strangers generating interethnic tensions.[25] Some rural habitats take on the size and appearance of a small town under the impact of nearby development projects, yet they are still referred to as a 'village'.

The discursive dichotomy of town and village generated in the early colonial period involved assumptions about the nature of villages that could never be reconciled with the diversity of Melanesian habitats or their relationship with the colonially created towns. The diversity has become even more complicated in the twenty-first century as Melanesians both in towns and in rural areas become increasingly dependent on a capitalist economy and experience new or exacerbated economic and gender inequalities, 'law and order' and other problems. Permanently town-dwelling Melanesians are still liable to romanticise the idyllic traditional 'village' (Lindstrom 2011), while its contemporary inhabitants are likely to be struggling with modern problems. In 2013 an elder of the village of Sarete, on Santo island in Vanuatu, described for me his village's contemporary 'development' committees and departments (of women's affairs, youth, fisheries, health, and justice). The titles were borrowed from national government, but the operation on the ground was more like a town council applying by-laws. They marked a boundary around the village and newcomers needed permission to enter and stay. They had a curfew system, blowing a whistle to signal children's bedtime, another whistle to signal the end of kava drinking time and 'lights out'. In an interesting claim to customary precedents my interlocutor told me current practises were like former systems of social control in villages. People used to control local boundaries in the past, he said, so the development committee was not necessarily a new phenomenon. It was very successful in curbing law and order problems, he claimed, and was paving the way for 'development'.

The politics of small-scale communities is increasingly coloured by conflicts over the nature and value of custom in the face of rapid socio-economic change, and the com-

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24   'Awareness' talks – on health, gender issues, peaceful dispute settlement and so on – by development-aid spokespeople are particularly common in rural Vanuatu. Travelling around its islands in recent years I have sometimes been asked by villagers whether I have come to do an 'awareness'.

25   See, for example, Biersack (2006), Kemp, Gillespie and Ramsay (2012), and Rumsey and Weiner (2004).

parative appropriateness of old and new styles of leadership. Factionalism is developing between those who seek to preserve 'tradition' and 'culture' and those who see tradition and culture as the problem. A recent ethnography of Tolai villagers in East New Britain, PNG (Martin 2013), details the disputation of leadership between older-style 'big-men' and newer entrepreneurs who see themselves as realists in dealing with unavoidable neo-liberal capitalism. The latter are portrayed derogatively by local critics as 'big-shots' who are commercialising 'custom' and pursuing individualism at the expense of customary relationships and obligations (Martin 2013). The accelerating development of capitalist class relations is thus visible not only in town but in *ples*, and the dynamic interaction of class relations with kinship and micro-ethnic relations is becoming an important consideration in research on the village and town relationship (Gewertz and Errington 1999, Martin 2013). We can no longer treat kin-ordered sociality in Melanesian rural habitats as immutable.

Comfortable generalisations of the late twentieth century about Melanesian sociality in town have also become questionable. Kinship and *wantok*ism remained important to the economic survival of migrants for several decades after the Second World War, as I have already noted here. By the new century, though, the conventional assumption that a l l migrant or post-migrant communities in town were dominated by *wantok* sensibilities had become less certain. Middle class families, increasingly committed to maintaining a stable standard of living, were now unenthusiastic about supporting less wealthy town-based relatives or visitors from *ples* (see Donner 2002, Mecartney 2000:138), and some élitists were restricting their sharing to their nuclear family members (Gewertz and Errington 1999). Transformations in informal habitats in town have also affected social support systems that were previously based on proximity of kin and *wantoks*. In Port Moresby and Port Vila, for example, while some long-established informal housing areas are still enclaves of a single ethnic or regional group, others have become ethnically diversified, and some more recently established 'settlements' display very little regional insularity.[26] Many settlers subdivide or sublease their plots of land to obtain a rental income, creating multi-ethnic environments. Moreover, urban marriages are increasingly between people from different regions.

With the constant movement of people nowadays between *ples* and town, and overseas, and the knowledge, technology and socioeconomic aspirations they carry with them, the distinction between a village sociality and a town sociality is becoming more and more difficult to make. At the same time, the village remains a potent discursive image in towns. In the Port Moresby settlements I have frequented, there are many adolescents for whom the city is the only home they know, though they cannot escape the ethnicity bequeathed by their parentage. In friendly or hostile inter-ethnic encoun-

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[26]   In Erima settlement, one of my Port Moresby research sites, an interlocutor claimed in 2001 that 'every Province in PNG' was now represented among its residents. See also Mecartney (2000:69–73), on the developments in the demography of Blacksands Settlement, Port Vila, Vanuatu.

ters in the city they are identified with a *ples* they may never have visited, and whose language they do not speak. Their vernacular is a hybrid language register, a slang combining elements of English, Tok Pisin and pidgin Motu.[27] Their settlement is their territory, but they are casually peripatetic, liable to delinquency, and vulnerable to the city's undeniable dangers. They cause anxiety to their parents, whose few recourses include sending them, or at least threatening to send them, 'to the village'. A *ples* they have possibly never seen, but that is represented to them in marked social contrast to the city – a village, perhaps far away, small, isolated, and tightly controlled by rules and regulations administered through all-encompassing kinship.

Village and town: three contemporary vignettes

While contemporary empirical research does not support the long-standing structural and social generalisations promulgated by development-orientated commentaries and by Melanesians themselves about the village in Melanesia or, by extension, its manifestation in 'village cities', I cannot suggest a serviceable alternative. To indicate the difficulty in representing Melanesian habitats as 'villages', 'urban villages' or 'villages cities', I offer three vignettes. The first is Hula, the main village of the coastal Vula'a people, 110 kilometres east of Port Moresby. In the early 1970s, when I was resident in Port Moresby and visited the area, it took only a few minutes to walk through it. Nowadays, however, Hula sprawls over several square kilometres. It has trade stores, a high school, churches of several denominations, and the flotilla along its shoreline includes not only canoes and banana boats, but trawlers and large motorboats. It is denser than some small European towns. Yet, it is still identified as a 'village'. The older villagers describe their forebears as 'fishing nomads' (van Heekeren 2010:48) referring to the fact that until about 200 years ago they lived in canoes, travelling along the coast, creating anchorages here and there until they were forced by circumstance to move on. Colonial interventions sought to stabilise mobile communities like the Vula'a into permanent villages, yet the Vula'a retain their former mobility to a degree. In the early 1960s a number of them established an anchorage settlement of canoes on the shore of Badili suburb, in Port Moresby, for a few years (Oram 1967). During that time a handful of them also established a camp on Daugo Island, offshore from the town. There is now a village with a population of more than 1,000 Vula'a in permanent housing on Daugo Island (Goddard 2013). They commute from the island to the city in minutes in motorised dinghies, manage a day-trip tourist business, and have allowed a sustainable aquarium company to operate there for a share of the profits.

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[27]   The latter is a simplification of the language of the Motu people that was spread along the south coast as a lingua franca called 'Police Motu' in the early colonial period. I prefer to call this contemporary form 'pidgin Motu' as it has mutated from formalised Police Motu.

My second vignette is Kila Kila in Port Moresby, a 'traditional village' completely hemmed in by a city of strangers on its own territory. In precolonial times the Koita migrated from a hinterland plateau, creating and abandoning hamlets as they moved ever closer to the coast. Some hamlets came to be established on a hilly area known as Kila Kila, and controlled a large territory stretching from the coast to about 14 miles inland (Orrell 1977). Port Moresby town grew into this territory in the first half of the twentieth century and the Kila Kila Koita consolidated themselves into a single village at the foot of the hill. After the Second World War some villagers moved to a location further up the hill, establishing a second village known as 'Kila Kila number 2' (Orrell 1977). The town's spreading suburbs inexorably surrounded the villages as the inhabitants slowly sold off some of their land for suburban and commercial development (Haynes 1990:101–102). The city has closed in further during recent decades, to the point where only one housing enclave is now known as Kila Kila village. Kila Kila possibly qualifies as an 'urban village' by the definition used in recent development-aid literature (see ADB 2016:x), but its inhabitants are struggling to retain their land and identity, and they talk of contemporary Kila Kila village in terms which bring to mind a ghetto (Post-Courier 2000, 2005, 2013; National 2014).

My third vignette indicates the importation of a Western model of executive living into PNG. The development-aid model of the 'village city' is fed by the prevalence of informal housing (or 'settlements') in cities. Yet, the unacknowledged obverse of estimations that, for example, fifty percent of Port Moresby's population live in informal settlements (ADB 2016:40) is that fifty percent live in formal housing. Many of the latter identify themselves as middle-class and professionally employed, and aspire to what they regard as appropriate housing. A Liquefied Natural Gas plant was built recently near Boera, a coastal village about twenty kilometres west of Port Moresby, accompanied by infrastructural developments creating a so-called 'growth corridor' between the city and the LNG site. After negotiations with landowners at Boera, work began in 2014 on 'Edai Town', a gated community near the village, from which residents could commute to work in Port Moresby. It is envisioned that when finished Edai Town will have 500 dwellings housing 2,000 people, who are anticipated to be 'mainly executives' (Business Advantage PNG [BAPNG] n.d.). The population of this exclusive 'town' will total about half of that of nearby Boera village. It will have security guards, a fire station, police station, medical centre, and leisure amenities such as a jogging track (BAPNG n.d., Edai Town n.d.). The contrast between the enclavist town and the village is, apart from the relative absence of Europeans, evocative of the early colonial period.

I hope to have shown in this article that, despite the resilience of the town-village dichotomy and its sociocultural connotations, Melanesian habitats continue to elude generalising models just as they did in early colonial times. The concept of 'village cities' derives from late-colonial-era perceptions that the 'village' could, to an extent, be found in the town, but we could equally say nowadays that the town can be found in the 'village'. I should add that I have no disagreement with the argument accompanying the

'village cities' model, that support for the improvement of living conditions for informal housing residents should not lie in 'formalizing the informal' (ADB 2016:xv). However, the assumption that their internal sociality has the integral nature of a stereotypical village of the late colonial period fails to account for the continuing mutability of the 'town' and the 'village' in Melanesia.

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